CLAIMS

Having thus described our invention, what we claim as new and desire to secure by Letters Patent is as follows:

1. A method of providing a composite data feed for an online meeting, said method comprising at least one of:

provides a capability for at least one participant node in said online meeting to input a layout rule for a customized composite image of said online meeting to be seen specifically at said at least one participant node; and

receiving a layout rule defining a composite image of said online meeting that can be customized for at least one participant node in said online meeting.

2. The method of claim 1, wherein said layout rule comprises a Boolean combination of conditions.

3. The method of claim 1, further comprising:

receiving data feeds from a plurality of nodes included in said online meeting; and

calculating a composite data feed image for said at least one participant node, said composite data feed image complying with said layout rule.

4. The method of claim 1, wherein said layout rule specifies at least one of:

a size of a display pane in said composite image of a given feed involved in said

online meeting;

a relative size of said display pane of said given feed;

a position of said display pane of said given feed;

a relative position of said display pane of said given feed;

whether said given feed is included in said composite image;

how frequently said layout rule is to be checked for updates;

how aggressively a layout specification of said layout rule should be executed in

terms of a range of whether said composite image includes only moderately different sized

displays or only one maximally large display with all other displays being maximally small;

a status of an owner of said given feed; and

a type of said given feed.

5. The method of claim 3, further comprising:

transmitting said composite data feed image for display on a display device.

6. The method of claim 3, wherein said calculating is accomplished at a server remote from

said at least one participant node.

7. The method of claim 3, wherein said calculating is accomplished at one of said at least

one participant node's location.

8. The method of claim 1, wherein said receiving said layout rule is periodically checked so

that said at least one participant node is able to revise said layout rule until one of:

said at least one participant node exits said online meeting; and

said online meeting terminates.

9. The method of claim 3, wherein said calculating the data feed includes at least one of:

an amount of audio activity, including a number of different speakers; and

a level of video activity, including at least one of an amount of overall movement and a number of moving figures.

10. The method of claim 3, said method further having at least one of the following capabilities:

said receiving of data feeds is from one or more distinct network types;

at least one node in said online meeting can serve as a data feed source;

said at least one participant node is able to specify a personal weighting preference to be used in said calculating;

a display for at least one input feed does not change;

said at least one participant node is able to change said layout rules during a given online meeting;

said at least one participant node is able to have at least some rules in said layout rules specified by another user, in addition to the rules said at least one participant node specifies;

a given set of layout rules can be applied to more than one said at least one participant node.

11. A method of providing a composite data feed for an online meeting, said method comprising:

calculating a composite image of said online meeting that is to be seen uniquely at a participant node, wherein a layout rule for said calculating said composite image can be dynamically changed during a course of said online meeting.

12. An apparatus comprising at least one of:

a graphical user interface to allow a participant node in an online meeting to provide a layout rule set for a customized composite image of said online meeting that is to be seen at said participant node;

a receiver to receive a layout rule set that defines a customized composite image to be presented to a participant node in an online meeting; and

a calculator to calculate a customized composite image to be presented to a participant node in an online meeting, said calculator receiving a plurality of feeds related to said online meeting and calculating said customized composite image in accordance with a layout rule set that defines a composite image to specifically be presented to said participant node.

13. A system comprising:

a first participant node;

at least one of a second participant node and a data feed node; and

a network interconnecting said first participant node to said at least one of a second

participant node and a data feed, said network thereby providing an online meeting including

said first participant node,

wherein said first participant node receives a customized composite image of said

online meeting that is calculated in accordance with a layout rule that defines a composite

image to be presented specifically to said first participant node.

14. A service comprising at least one of:

conducting an online meeting in which any or all nodes participating in said online

meeting receives a composite image of said online meeting that is potentially customized for

each said node;

operating one of said nodes in said online meeting in which said customized

composite images are possible;

calculating a composite image in said online meeting;

providing a facility for said online meeting, said facility comprising at least one of a

hardware or software component to be used in one of said nodes and at least one of a

hardware or software component to be used in calculating a composite image in said online

meeting;

providing a maintenance for said facility for said online meeting; and

providing a training for at least one of using and operating said online meeting or said

facility.

15. A signal-bearing medium tangibly embodying a program of machine-readable instructions executable by a digital processing apparatus to perform a method of providing a composite data feed for an online meeting, said method comprising at least one of:

provided a capability for at least one participant node in said online meeting to input a layout rule for a customized composite image of said online meeting to be seen specifically at said at least one participant node; and

receiving a layout rule defining a composite image of said online meeting that can be customized for at least one participant node in said online meeting.